Yuma, AZ

Yuma became Bob's next port in the storm. For almost 8 years; between 1968 and 1975; Bob tried yet again for some normalcy in his life. He established Arizona residency by buying a small home at 889 First Street in Yuma. He was hired by Farkas TV. Then signed on as a tractor operator, for a large citrus grower, as a second job.

"I went to work for Bruce Church citrus farms. In Yuma (was also) date land, and I worked as a drag line operator, which is driving a big caterpillar tractor with a huge cable. Actually, there are two tractors. You got a cable about 2-3" diameter, about 1/8 a mile long and you drag it (between tractors) in the desert. It'll eliminate Palo Verde, Manzanita and Mesquite…clears the land of any organic material."

"The wages were minimum wage (which was) $4.00 an hour at that time. They pay once a week or every 2 weeks. The 'funny' part about it is…uh, a couple of days before pay day, all of a sudden, here come the Border Patrol…takes everybody that didn't have a (green) card or birth certificate with them. (So) I wound up going to Mexico…Bruce Church was (getting) free labor, (not) having to pay for it."

Bob didn't argue with the law, just got on the bus as he was told, with all the other migrant workers. They were bussed to the immigration processing center and eventually interviewed. When Bob's turn came, suddenly Bob spoke perfect English. The authorities hauled Bob back stateside, but were not convinced he was a US citizen, let alone a regular employee of Bruce Church. '*I can prove it*.' Bob said, '*See that tractor over there?*
Go check behind the seat. My name's on the toolbox.'

Bob continued to work for Bruce Church for little over a year. But then he got hurt on a side job busting horses!

"I had hurt my back, the upper portion…I'd (crunched) my 3rd thoracic (vertebrae). The foreman, for whom I was busting horses, I had told him not to bring the kids around the horse. Well (he did anyway) and I was bareback. The horse bolted to where the kids was and down I go. Knocked me out. They left me there. (Once I came to) I had to drive myself (back) to Yuma. I wound up in the hospital for 4 days. I was put in traction. Then I went to claim unemployment…and there were no records at Bruce Church that I ever worked there…"

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Mr. Vallejos went back to what he knew best. Rocks. Not only did Bob start up the business of 'Lapidary Arts and Crafts' in Yuma, he also signed a contract to teach lapidary at Arizona Western College. As his life became more predictable (and less dangerous), Bob found a nice woman 12 years his senior and married her. Catherin M. Mahoney and Robert G. Vallejos tied the knot in Imperial, CA on 11 April 1973. Bob's daughter Cathy lived with them for a while and remembers her fondly. 'Kay' Vallejos worked as a receptionist in a doctor's office and got Cathy a good paying job there.

The local newspaper, The Yuma Sun, ran an article on Bob Vallejos dated 20 Feb 1972. The title of the article, 'Indian Father's Dream Is to Bring All His Children Together in Yuma.' The article outlines the loss of Nellie, his Korean War horrors, his (potential) wife Kay and his hopes of bringing together all his children; plus, his father Frank, (who 4 months earlier lost his wife Gertrude to cancer). Quoted by the reporter,

"I don't believe in welfare, and I don't believe in bankruptcy," he said. "I believe in paying my debts and I'm going to do it."

"I'm also going to set up the rock shop business to keep my wife and kids. But I owe it to them to take them around the world, to help wipe away some of the misery they have experienced in Colorado."

Even then, Bob was concerned his health issues would soon curtail his grand plan. He was in a hurry to secure the income he needed to make it so. While scouting for new mineral deposits near Douglas, Bob stopped in at a well-known Mexican café. While enjoying a cool drink and a bite to eat, he began a conversation with a fellow geologist.

"…he was from Mexico, and we got to chit chatten (at this) real nice Mexican café. We were both talkin geology and he says, 'God, you know your geology. You know better than I do.' I says, 'Naw, I just know my rocks.' That's all I told him. (Then) he says, 'How'd you like to look for rocks in Mexico?' Huh…well. Yeah. 'I'll send you a letter and get you legalized, then you can come and go as you please.' "

Bob didn't think too much about such an endeavor. He had enough to worry about at the time, until 2 weeks later…

"I got a letter from the Federal Bureau of Mines…Minerals and Mines in Mexico. From the Presidente! POW! Wow, I says…what the hell makes me so damn important? I start reading the letter; 'We would like to have the pleasure of your presence at our next National Conference of Geologists.' (It said) all the fees will be paid by the Mexican government. Jesus Christ!"

Bob was already familiar with the government of Mexico kicking out the US business, Phelps-Dodge Mining Corp. from the town of Nacozari.

"…they got kicked out of Mexico because (they were) cheatin and literally makin slaves out of them."

On the appointed day of the conference Bob was flown to Hermosillo, Mexico; first class all the way! His fluent Spanish allowed him to fit right in with fellow geologists. During discussions, Bob spoke up…

"Why not check out the area of Nacozari? It's got great potential. I think some awful deep deposits could be found in that area. They asked, 'How do you know?' I says, 'because the rocks, anywhere you look are stained with copper dioxide (from) fumes that come up out of the ground. (Naturally occurring) sulfuric acid breaks down the pyrite, which produces (hydrogen) sulfide gas, which brings up this copper stain.' "

"It's like a paintbrush. It paints the rocks, a copper (blue green) color, like the rainbow colors, very similar. They're all over the place. There's a deep-seated body in there."

Within a very short time, Bob was made an offer he couldn't refuse.

"Would you like the job? You've got 5 minutes to decide."

"Oh shit, what the hell did I get myself into? I thought and I thought; an God, I can't break the contract, I'm teaching, and I told um that. He says, 'Well, we can arrange for the dismissal of your contract.' 'Whoa,' I says, 'alright! Let's go!' I didn't like teachin there because it's all book read. 'OK,' I says, 'what's my share in it?' 'Whatever you find, and it's big enough, you get (4.9%)' Jesus Christ! Dollar signs all over the place!"

Bob negotiated for a crew for land surveying, (people he knew already in Nacozari), plus the assistance of a few other geologists. One of the perks was an 'ambassadorship' which enabled Bob to cross the border easily.

"I already knew what I had seen there…in Nacozari. Why do you think I suggested the area? I knew what the stained rock was. God, it involved 3 mountain ranges! I didn't know exactly (the extent of it until I did the) core drills. (We sent) out thousands and thousands of samples (for testing)."

Bob and team spent 2-3 years preparing a detailed, several thousand-page report. It was a hard commute; from Yuma to Nacozari.

"(I flew) from Yuma to Douglas. Douglas is on one side and on the Mexican side is Agua Prieta 'Dark Water' is the meaning. They'd pick me up in a cab an take me over to Agua Prieta, board a….small charter plane; son-of-a-bitch it was hard on my eardrums, cause I'd had um ruptured; and fly all the way onto a landing strip they had on top of the mountain (above) the town of Nacozari. (Then) I'd ride (by mule) all the way down. That's how primitive it was at that time down in Mexico. Poor people were <u>very</u> poor. If a person had 10 beans, he's share 9 of them. That's how beautiful that village was at that time."

Bob already had an agreement with the locals to do some mining for agates and jaspers in the 'Lost Indian Mine' to supply his rock shop. Bob did not have claim to the mine but bought what the locals could pull from it. He was able to oversee the survey and core drilling for the Mexican government, at the same time. Unfortunately, a family crisis pulled Bob away as he was finishing the fieldwork and completing all the major reports.

"My daughter (Annie – not her real name) called me – how the hell she got my (Mexico) telephone number (I don't know). She called down to Mexico (to say) she was in big, big trouble with narcotics. Fuck. So, I went and picked her up (from Albuquerque, NM.) and brought her down to Mexico. I couldn't leave at that time, there was just no way. So, I drove there and back non-stop. I left her with (the) Encinas family while I was up at the 'Lost Indian Mine'."

"After I finished the reports and they liked what they saw, they wanted to mine – open pit mine. OK. It's so damn big, you (could) have at least 12 open pit mines in that damn area, that's how big that (copper) deposit (was)."

Bob eventually was able to break free long enough to take his daughter back to Yuma. His wife Kay was there alone with her and was quite upset, when Bob finally returned from Mexico.

*"She said, 'I don't want no part of this **** family, you're all nuts!' I said, 'Fine, get your damn divorce and get the hell out of here.' That's what she did. Of course, you know, you couldn't blame her. I wouldn't want to live in that type of atmosphere either."*

International relationships soured rapidly soon after. Some unsettling stories about Mr. Vallejos had been left with the Encinas family. Then, while Bob was working at his rock shop in Yuma, he got a visit from a representative of the Mexican government.

"You're Mr.Vallejos?" the gentleman asked in Spanish.

"Yes! How are you?"

"Very good…" he paused, "you're not dead."

A flurry of Spanish between the two men revealed a claim had been made by some members of Bob's family. A claim that Bob had killed himself and left a will stating everything was to go to them. Dumbfounded at such audacity, Bob suggested, 'if (they) showed up down there again….shoot um!'

Mexican authorities rescinded Bob's 'ambassadorship', and he decided to turn his share of the mining efforts over to the townspeople of Nacozari. He still had access to rock mined from the 'Lost Indian Mine', but the dream to care for his father and children evaporated.

Like spitting on hot pavement.